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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4531
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 0444
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 6469
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA IMMEDIATE 5221
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA IMMEDIATE 7548
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE IMMEDIATE 9027
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO IMMEDIATE 5738
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI IMMEDIATE 7417
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEATRS/TREASURY DEPT WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHMFSS/USFJ IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 001588

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/13/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL JA

SUBJECT: JAPANESE DIET DISSOLUTION: PRIME MINISTER ASO
UNDER PRESSURE

Classified By: CDA RON POST, REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The opposition Democratic Party of Japan won a decisive victory in the July 12th Tokyo city assembly elections, a bellwether of the public's mood in the weeks ahead of a required general election. PM Aso, according to media reports, has decided to dissolve the Diet on July 21st and hold the Lower House election on August 30. However, a "dump Aso" movement is gaining momentum, with younger and mid-level Diet members convinced that since they and their party do not stand a chance in the election under Aso, the LDP should replace him as Prime Minister before the Diet election with a less unpopular LDP leader. End Summary.

LANDSLIDE VICTORY FOR THE OPPOSITION

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¶2. (C) On July 12th, the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won a decisive victory over the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election, the last and most important in a series of local elections in the run-up to this year's national general election. Contempt for Prime Minister Aso and the LDP drove votes for the opposition DPJ: a full 93 percent of DPJ candidates won their races, and the party became the largest in the assembly. By contrast, the LDP suffered a historic defeat, not only losing its status as top party for the first time in five decades, but also falling short of a combined majority with its junior partner, the New Komeito Party. Although the Tokyo Assembly electoral system of proportional representation prevented a total sweep by the opposition, DPJ candidates claimed victory in 6 of 7 head-to-head contests where only one seat was up for grabs, a very bad sign for the ruling party going into the general election.

WORRISOME TRENDS FOR THE RULING PARTY

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¶3. (C) Other trends have emerged that also spell trouble for the ruling party going into the general election. Young candidates and "new faces" defeated many established politicians. For example, a six-term LDP incumbent lost a seat held by the LDP for over half a century to a 26-year-old newcomer from the DPJ. High voter turnout, in this case over 10 points above the last election in 2005, hurt the LDP. The

extra votes came largely from the ranks of undecided voters who supported the DPJ by a wide margin. Even more worrying for the LDP was the large number of LDP supporters who broke from the party to vote for the DPJ.

ELECTION NEAR?

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14. (C) During an emergency meeting with LDP executives on July 13th, Prime Minister Aso announced his intention to dissolve the Diet on July 21st and hold Lower House elections on August 30th, according to Embassy Tokyo contacts. One media contact who covers Aso intimated that the dissolution could slip to July 22nd or 23rd, but added that the August 30th election date is "firm." Initial reports that Aso intended to move at a much quicker pace - dissolving the Diet on July 14th and holding an election in early August - had caused some Embassy Tokyo contacts to wonder whether Aso had "lost his mind." Holding an election so soon after the LDP's defeat in Tokyo "will be political suicide," one contact said.

WILL ASO BE OUSTED BY HIS OWN PARTY?

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15. (C) By agreeing to a slower dissolution/election schedule, Aso appears to have eased the concerns of the Komeito, which wanted a later election date, but no later than September 6th. However, Aso is not out of the woods by

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any means. A large number of LDP members have formed a "dump Aso" movement under the leadership of former party Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa. They may force Aso out and install a less unpopular leader before either the dissolution or a general election. This group of mostly young and mid-level Diet members believes that there is no way that the LDP can successfully fight an election under Aso. One possible Aso replacement is Health Minister Masuzoe, a telegenic figure with high approval ratings. A senior LDP official told Embassy Tokyo that, in the next day or so, this group could assemble enough signatures to call a general party meeting where they could call for Aso's removal and the election of a new party President. "Replacing Aso with someone new could get us 10 to 20 more seats in the general election; we'll probably still lose, but the scars wouldn't be as deep," this contact explained.

POST